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ABSTRACT

This paper examines cultural mistrust of whites and its resulting manifestations, particularly Black nationalism. First, working definitions of racism and stress are given, to place cultural mistrust in the context of a coping style used to respond to racism. As one coping style, Black nationalism involved a rejection of White political and social institutions and a concern with developing Black institutions. Next, conceptual and empirical work on the measurement of the Black nationalistic coping style is outlined, and a table is given showing a positive relationship among four identified components of Black nationalism. The final section describes the relationship between measures of Black nationalism and cultural mistrust. Differences and similarities between Afro-American and Black Caribbean students are presented. The paper concludes that cultural mistrust may lead to a new development of self by Black people. (CG)

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Cultural Mistrust and Black Nationalism: Evidence of Positive Relationship

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Introduction

It is conceivable that in a symposium on cultural mistrust, the participants would feel compelled to evaluate the construct from a clinical perspective. Is this dimension of personality a set of appropriate and adaptive cognitions or is it best seen as a form of pathology? The risk would be that all of the presenters on the panel would come down on the same side - squarely in the middle. Arguments would run along the lines that any trait can be pathological in given situation or taken to a particular extreme. In other situations, or in moderation, the same trait might be quite adaptive. Certainly, an audience bombarded with a series of neutral positions is less likely to be stimulated to generate thoughtful input. Therefore, neutrality on the cultural mistrust dimensions will be avoided in this presentation.

This paper centers around one central theme. Cultural mistrust is seen as fundamental to the construction or new definitions of Black humanity - definitions that run counter to those that emerge from racist institutions and from the stresses of racism. Three issues will be discussed. First, working definitions of racism and stress will be put forth. These are necessary so that cultural mistrust can be viewed within a system of coping styles that Black people use to respond to racism. Subsequently, conceptual and empirical work on the measurement of the Black nationalistic coping

style will be outlined. This will be done to facilitate the evaluation of evidence that is presented in the final section. This section describes the relationship between the Black nationalism scale and the Cultural Mistrust Scale.

Stress and racism defined.

Burchfield (1979) suggested that psychologists define stress as an interruption of psychological homeostasis. Though it is not cited often, this definition is important for several reasons. First, it frees psychological investigators from bland biologically based definitions (e.g., Cannon, 1936; Selye, 1976). These tend to define stress in terms of autonomic or endocrine responses to environmental events. Admittedly, these physiological systems are quite sensitive to changes in human emotional state, and a day spent observing them in a psychophysiological laboratory is a fascinating experience. On the other hand, it is inaccurate to define psychological stress in terms of autonomic or endocrine pressor responses, since these can occur in the absence of changes in emotional state (e.g., in viral infections, postural changes or the d ive reflex). In addition, though some degree of patterning of autonomic changes has been shown to occur in response to different emotional states (Ax, 1953; Ekman, Levenson, & Friesen, 1983) these patterns cannot

be expected to reflect the richness of emotional changes elicited by a complex social environment.

Two other facets of Burchfield's definition seem important. The concept of psychological homeostasis implies there are optimal set points in cognitive and effective states around which humans, under ordinary conditions, tend to hover. This notion seems to be consistent with Akbar's (1981) attacks on approaches to psychiatric diagnoses that center around statistical central tendency and his emphasis on mental growth toward an optimal state as a defining characteristic of normality. Finally, the definition is consistent with the appraisal process Lazarus (1966) introduced in defining stress. For Lazarus, a stressful event is in the eye of the beholder. His definition explains how some events become stressful, Burchfield, on the other hand, specifies when they are stressful.

In like manner, Karenga's (1982) thoughts on the nature of racism are quite compelling. He sees racism as "a system of denial and deformation of the history and humanity of.. people of color (based) primarily on the specious concept of race" (p 204). Karenga noted three modes of expression for racism. There is the destruction of the history and productive capacity of a people. In addition, elaborate pseudointellectual props are invented to justify the

practice of racism. Finally, political, economic and social institutions are set up to insure the maintenance of white power and positions of privilege. Karenga distinguishes quite nicely between the attitudinal concept of prejudice and the systematic practice of racism. Racism clearly involves a power relationship and it is a rare instance indeed where people of color impose racism.

There is no doubt that a myriad of circumstances exist in the environment of Black people that produce interruptions in the psychological homeostasis. The modern manifestations of racism can take the form of absolute terror or they can be subtle and insidious. Nevertheless, these manifestations render the environment of the racially oppressed the most stressful imaginable because they cause the oppressed to doubt their own humanity. No greater disruption of psychological homeostasis exists.

Measuring Black nationalism

One of the styles for coping with racism outlined by Harrell (1979) concerns itself directly with the rejection of the institutions and intellectual tenets of racism. This style, the Black nationalistic style, was characterized as involving a rejection of white political and social

institutions and a concern with developing corresponding Black institutions. As we began to develop a suitable measure of this complex style, we found that Terrell's ideas (e.g., Terrell & Terrell, 1981) on cultural mistrust were central to the construct. Before examining the relationship between these constructs, a summmary of our efforts to measure the Black nationalistic style will be provided.

At least three factors make it very difficult to measure Black nationalism. First, the concept is multi-faceted. Black nationalism is not reducible to simple positive assertions of race consciousness. Rather it involves a developing knowledge of the vast and intricate mechanisms supporting racist practices. With this knowledge there comes a growing recognition that interpersonal meanness plays but a minor role in the maintaining of racism. Secondly, items measuring the style must be reasonably subtle. If agreement with an item becomes tantamount to endorsing a slogan, it will be impossible to discrimination between those with a deep commitment to the style and those with very shallow nationalistic notions. Finally, items become obsolete rapidly. In the past, attitudes toward events that occurred in the 1950's or 1960's were measured. These

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items are quite inappropriate for younger individuals including people who are now in their early twenties. Several scales used to measure Black nationalism or Black consciousness can be viewed critically in light of these factors (e.g., Gurin & Epps, 1975; Banks, 1970). Because of the limitations in existing scales we elected to develop a separate scale to assess the Black nationalistic coping style.

The work of Dr. Kemba Maish (1977) was central to the development of the Black nationalism scale. Several components of nationalism were identified conceptually. The first relates to attitudes about institutions and institutionalized values that are based on white supremacy. This is termed the institutional dimension. A second component focuses on the extent to which Black cultural pride and African nationalism are celebrated. The label applied to this dimension is Afrocentric orientation. The collectivism/socialism dimension is concerned with the individuals sense of the importance of collective responsibility and community good. The fourth dimension is termed system understanding. It focuses on the extent to which the individual has developed an understanding of the role economic and political forces play in supporting racism on a national and international level.

Conceptually, these components of Black nationalism are related in a positive fashion (see Table 1). However,

TABLE 1

The Black Nationalism Scale: Theoretical and empirical interrelationships and psychometric properties of subscales

	Institutional	Afrocentric	Collectivism	System Und.
Institutional				
Afrocentric	Strong			
Collectivism	Moderate	Moderate		
System Und.	Moderate	Moderate	Strong	

Theoretical

Empirical Relationships
N=92

	Inst.	Afro	Coll	Syst
Institutional				
Afrocentric	.20*			
Collectivism	.18*	.67**		
System Und.	.22*	.56**	.40**	

	Alpha	Test-retest
Institutional	.41	.34
Afrocentric	.82	.64
Collectivism	.38	.65
System Understanding	.46	.38

N=92

* .05
** .01

the strength of these interrelationships was thought to vary. For example, it was assumed that the institutional and Afrocentric dimensions would be related strongly. A less impressive relationship between these dimensions and the collectivism/socialism and system understanding dimensions was expected. This network of relationships served as a guide for item selection. When subscales were developed candidate items were dropped when they reduced subscale homogeneity or failed to approximate the interrelationship specified in the theoretical network with candidate items from other subscales. The subscales, in the present stage of development, vary with respect to the strength of their psychometric properties. These are summarized in Table 1. The Afrocentric orientation subscale is viewed as the strongest at this time. However, validational studies are best described as in their initial phases.

Cultural mistrust and the Black nationalism style

Running through all four of the dimensions of Black nationalism seemed to be a theme of the fundamental incorrectness of the traditional behavior and world view of whites. It appeared that predating the emergence of this style would be a kind of dynamic suspicion of the behavioral-political position of white America. This dimension seemed to be measured best by Terrell.

Therefore, the relationships between his mistrust measure and our experimental subscales measuring Black nationalism were examined.

The scales were administered to 60 Afro American students at Howard University. Positive correlations of a moderate magnitude emerged between Cultural mistrust and three of the Black nationalistic subscales (see Table 2). The relationship failed to hold for the institutional subscale. The findings indicate that the tendency to mistrust whites is related to more than just the embracing of Black cultural forms. It is also related to an affinity for more communal and collective (versus individualistic) social attitudes. The association with the system understanding subscale is reflective of a greater tendency toward an awareness of subtle systematic elements of racial oppression in the more mistrustful individuals.

As part of the same study, both scales were administered to 40 Black, Howard students from the Caribbean. These students scored higher on the Afrocentric and collectivism/socialism subscales than the Afro American sample. They did not score differently than the Afro Americans on the cultural mistrust scale or on the other Black nationalism subscales. More importantly, in the Caribbean sample, we did not find the same pattern of relationships between mistrust and the Black nationalism subscales that we found

TABLE 2

Relationships between Black Nationalism Subscale scores and the Cultural Mistrust Inventory (CMI) In Caribbean . Afro American and combined samples

SCALES	CARIBBEAN N=47	AFRO AM N=60	FULL N=107
CMI Institutional	.19	.04	.12
CMI Afrocentric	.26*	.47**	.35**
CMI Collectivism	.09	.53**	.31**
CMI System Und.	.01	.32**	.18*

* < .05

** < .01

in the Afro American sample. Cultural mistrust was related to the Afrocentric subscale only and that relationship was a rather weak one.

The relatively high scores of the Caribbean students on the Afrocentric and collectivism/socialism subscales were not surprising. Caribbean students, in general, tend to be more oriented than Afro Americans, toward Afrocentric cultural activities and they appear to be more experienced with collective and socialistic ideas. On the other hand, the Cultural Mistrust Inventory and the system understanding inventory may suffer from a similar problem in the Caribbean sample. Many of the items are geared specifically toward the American experience of oppression. This is basically a minority group (see Boykin, 1983) experience and differs from that of the Caribbean students. Their experience may have involved racist elements but they were, by and large, members of the majority group in their own nations. These scales may be in need of reworking if they are to be used in samples of Black people outside of the United States.

One final finding is worth mentioning. We found no evidence that the more nationalistic people in the study were having greater difficulty negotiating the academic system. That is, GPA and the Afrocentrism subscale were positively correlated ($r = 24$, $p < .005$) in the full

sample. This relationship only approached significance in the two subsamples. Cultural mistrust was not related to GPA in either sample or in the full sample.

Conclusion

Racism, at its core, is the act of denying a people the expression of their own humanity. It sets in motion a series of overt and subtle stressors. Mistrust of whites is not an unexpected response from people of African descent who are raised in racist environments. As measured by Terrell, cultural mistrust seems to be related to several aspects of the Black nationalistic coping style. One facet of this style is the reassertion of African humanity. Hence, though certain maladaptive aspects of cultural mistrust may be demonstrated by other presenters today, it is likely to be central to the development of a new definition of self by Black people. We see it as an important building block in the development of the Black mind.

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